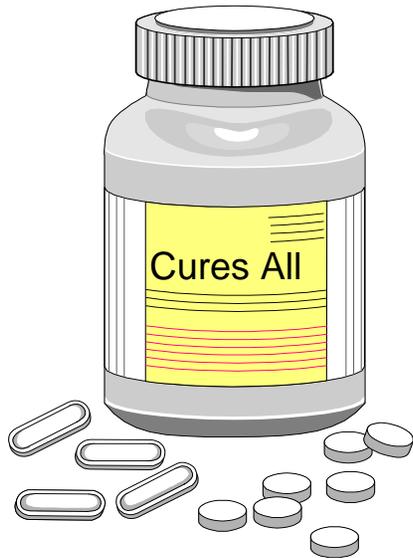




Fraudulent Health Claims: Don't Be Fooled



Billions of consumer dollars are wasted on unproven, fraudulently marketed, and sometimes useless health care products and treatments. In addition to wasting their money, consumers with serious medical problems may be wasting valuable time before they seek proper treatment. Even worse, some products may cause serious harm and endanger lives.

Fortunately, there are ways to tell which health-related claims are likely to be legitimate. This brochure will help you spot false and unsubstantiated claims. It describes some typical areas where fraud flourishes and suggests how you can protect yourself.



How to Spot False Claims

Remember the first rule of thumb for evaluating health claims: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Also, learn to recognize the typical phrases and marketing techniques used to deceive consumers:

- ◆ The product is advertised as a quick and effective cure-all for a wide range of ailments or for an undiagnosed pain.

- ◆ The promoters use key words, such as *scientific breakthrough*, *miraculous cure*, *exclusive product*, *secret ingredient* or *ancient remedy*.
- ◆ The promoter claims the medical profession or research scientists have conspired to suppress the product.
- ◆ The advertisement includes undocumented case histories claiming amazing results.
- ◆ The product is advertised as available from only one source, and payment in advance is required.

In addition, health care clinics that require patients to travel away from home to receive treatment may be suspect. While many clinics offer effective treatments, some prescribe untested, unapproved, ineffective, and possibly dangerous “cures.” Moreover, physicians who work in such clinics may be unlicensed or lack appropriate specialization. For these reasons, you should contact state or local health authorities where the clinic is located before you arrange to go.

Finally, don't rely on promises of a “money-back guarantee.” Be aware that many fly-by-night operators will not be around to respond to a refund request.



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Why Health Fraud Schemes Work

Health fraud is a business that sells false hope. It preys on people who are victims of diseases that have no medical cures, such as AIDS, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, and certain forms of cancer. It also thrives on the wishful thinking of those who want short-cuts to weight loss or improvements to personal appearance. It makes enormous profits because it promises quick cures and easy solutions to better health or personal attractiveness.



Some Medical Problems That Attract Health Fraud Schemes

Cancer

A diagnosis of cancer can bring feelings of fear and hopelessness. Many people may be tempted to turn to unproven remedies or clinics that promise a cure. Although some cancer patients have been helped by participating in legitimate clinical trials of experimental therapies, many others have wasted time and money on fraudulently marketed, ineffective treatments.

When you are evaluating cancer-cure claims, keep in mind that no single

device or remedy is capable of treating all types of cancer. Cancer is a name given to a wide range of diseases that require different forms of treatment best determined by a medical doctor.

For more information about cancer, contact the American Cancer Society office listed in your yellow pages. To order free publications on cancer research and treatment, call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service: 1-800-422-6237.

AIDS and HIV

People diagnosed with AIDS and HIV infection also may feel pressured to try untested "experimental" drugs or treatments. Although there are legitimate treatments that can extend life and improve the quality of life for AIDS patients, there is, so far, no cure for AIDS. Trying unproven products or treatments can be dangerous, and may delay proper medical care. It also can be expensive and usually is not covered by insurance.

Don't be pressured into making an immediate decision about trying an untested product. Ask for time to get more information from a knowledgeable physician or health care professional. Legitimate health care providers will not object to your seeking additional information. The U.S. Government has established a toll-free HIV-AIDS Treat-

ment Information Service, 1-800-HIV-0440. This information help line is staffed by health information specialists who are fluent in English and Spanish.

Arthritis

If you are among the estimated 37 million Americans who suffer from one of the many forms of arthritis, be aware that this disease invites a flood of fraudulent products and services. This is because medical science has not yet found a cure for arthritis. The Arthritis Foundation advises that symptoms should be monitored by a doctor because the condition can worsen if it is not properly treated.

An estimated \$2 billion is spent annually on unproven arthritis remedies. Thousands of dietary and natural "cures" are sold for arthritis — mussel extract, vitamin pills, desiccated liver pills, and honey and vinegar mixtures. Many scientists believe there is insufficient medical evidence to suggest that a lack of vitamins or minerals causes arthritis or that taking dietary supplements can give relief. For a free brochure about unproven remedies, call the Arthritis Foundation, toll-free, 1-800-283-7800 (9:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday-Friday), or write: Arthritis Foundation, P.O. Box 19000, Atlanta, Georgia 30326.



Precautions for Taking Dietary Supplements

There are thousands of dietary supplements on the market. Many contain vitamins and minerals to supplement the amounts of these nutrients that people get from the food they eat. There also are many products on the market that contain substances such as high-potency free amino acids, botanicals, enzymes, herbs, animal extracts, and bioflavonoids.

Some dietary supplements have documented benefits; the advantages of others are unproven and claims about those products may be false or misleading. For example, claims that you can eat all you want and lose weight effortlessly are not true. To lose weight, you must lower your calorie intake or increase your calorie use through exercise. Most experts recommend doing both. Similarly, no body building product can “tone you up” effortlessly or build muscle mass without exercise. Claims to the contrary are false. Other questionable claims may involve products advertised as effective in curing insomnia, reversing hair loss, relieving stress, curing impotency, improving memory or eyesight, and slowing the aging process.

In addition to lacking documented effectiveness, some dietary supplements may be harmful under some conditions of use. Reports of adverse reactions to dietary supplements are monitored by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to identify emerging safety issues.

According to the FDA, the following substances in dietary supplements are among those that raise serious safety issues at certain concentrations: chaparral, comfrey, yohimbe, lobelia, germander, willow bark, guar gum, jin bu huan, ma huang, L-tryptophan, phenylalanine, and germanium. In addition, some vitamins and minerals can cause problems for some people when taken in excessive doses. These include vitamin A, niacin, vitamin B₆, vitamin D, iron, and folic acid. And remember, a label of “natural” is no guarantee of a product’s safety or effectiveness.

Consumers who use dietary supplements should always read product labels to determine the % daily value for various nutrients contained in the product. Also, it’s a good idea to seek advice from a health professional before taking dietary supplements, particularly for children, adolescents, older or chronically ill persons, and women who are pregnant or breast-feeding.



For More Information or To Report a Problem

- ◆ To determine the value of a health care product or treatment, consult a pharmacist, doctor, or other health professional.
- ◆ To report a company you believe may be making false advertising claims, contact the FTC by phone: 202-FTC-HELP (382-4357); TDD: 202-326-2502, by mail: Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580, or by e-mail: use the complaint form at www.ftc.gov.
- ◆ To report a company for falsely labeling its products or to report a serious adverse effect associated with the use of a dietary supplement, call your local Food and Drug Administration office.
- ◆ For information about a particular hospital, clinic, or treatment center, contact state or local health authorities where the facility is located. If it is in a foreign country, contact that government’s health authority to see that the facility is properly licensed and equipped to handle the proce-

dures involved. For information about facilities in Mexico, contact the Secretary of Health (Secretaria De Salud) in the Mexican state where the facility is located. Here is a list of phone numbers for Mexican states that border the U.S.:

| | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Baja California | (112) 201-38 |
| Sonora | (62) 13-42-81 |
| Chihuahua | (41) 13-38-05 |
| Coahuila | (84) 15-57-33 |
| Nuevo Leon | (8) 343-31-37 |
| Tamaulipas | (131) 222-93 |

- ◆ In addition, you may wish to contact your state Attorney General's office or a local consumer agency to get more information or to report problems. These offices are listed in your telephone directory.